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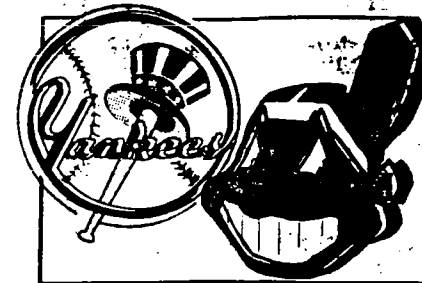
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# EPA orders lead smelter to close

By SANDRA LIVINGSTON  
PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

## CLEVELAND

The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency yesterday ordered Master Metals Inc. to immediately shut down its lead-smelting operations because of "health-threatening" violations of air standards.

Recent data showed that national air-quality standards were being exceeded at Master Metals' property line by more than 2,300%, according to the agency. That's the worst level of such lead pollution recorded in

Ohio and possibly in the nation, government officials said.

Executives of the lead-smelting company on W. 3rd St. could not be reached for comment yesterday.

Separately, a trial was scheduled for today in Cleveland Housing Court on a city request to shut down what it has termed "the notorious environmental polluter" until the lead-pollution problem was resolved.

The city planned to press ahead with a trial unless the company told Housing Judge William Corrigan to-

day it would shut down until city and state concerns were resolved.

"These violations greatly concern me because public health is threatened," said Donald R. Schregardus, Ohio EPA director. "I will not allow Master Metals to start operating again until it proves the plant can operate in continuous compliance, and all other operations at the plant will not" exceed air-quality standards for lead.

Master Metals extracts lead from batteries and other materials through a smelting process and sells the lead.

During the past decade, it has repeatedly been on the wrong side of federal regulators. It was cited several times for violating worker-health rules, and in 1990 a federal judge ordered it to remove most of its 40 employees because they had excessive levels of lead in their blood.

Federal, state and city regulators also have pursued the company in the past several years for violating environmental laws.

The company has said it has spent several million dollars to improve equipment and facilities.

Tomorrow, the U.S. Justice Department was to file papers in federal court in Cleveland concerning its nearly two-year effort to make the company pay hefty penalties for allegedly violating a consent decree with the U.S. EPA. The consent decree concerns the company's handling of hazardous materials; the Justice Department is seeking about \$1.6 million.

Officials with both the state and U.S. EPA said yesterday they expected the Ohio EPA action would shut down all Master Metals opera-

tions until the company met several requirements.

Schregardus said the company must develop a program for operations, maintenance and monitoring that will ensure compliance with emissions standards; conduct a comprehensive computer-modeling analysis demonstrating that lead furnaces can operate at full capacity and not violate air-quality standards for lead; and receive written authorization from Schregardus before resuming operations.

SEE EPA/6-A

EPA Region 5 Records Ctr.



268121

August 4, 1992

## EPA

### FROM/1-A

Since January, Master Metals has been required by the U.S. EPA to monitor lead levels outside the plant. Ohio EPA said yesterday that, during the first three months of the year, the average concentration of lead exceeded national standards by more than 2,300%.

From April through June, the average lead concentration exceeded national standards by more than 1,700%, the agency said.

"We've never had measurements reach this level" in Ohio, said Tom Rigo, a field operations manager with the Ohio EPA's division of air-pollution control.

Rigo said that in 1989 the agency ordered the company to install new equipment to limit emissions from the plant's furnaces.

But he said that many times, as a result of "poor operations," dust has escaped furnaces and not gone into control devices that would filter out lead.

He also said the air-pollution problem might be caused by lead from emissions that had fallen to the ground and then were kicked back into the air.

William Gruber, chief assistant law director for Cleveland, said the city would pursue its case today to make sure Master Metals shut down until it resolved its problems.

Gruber said it was not the city's aim to put the company out of business. "They've made the business decision for several years — it appears to us — allowing the pollution to continue over and over again."